Maps of Ancient Buddhist India

drawn and compiled by

Ānandajoti Bhikkhu

(Revised August 2008)

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PREFACE

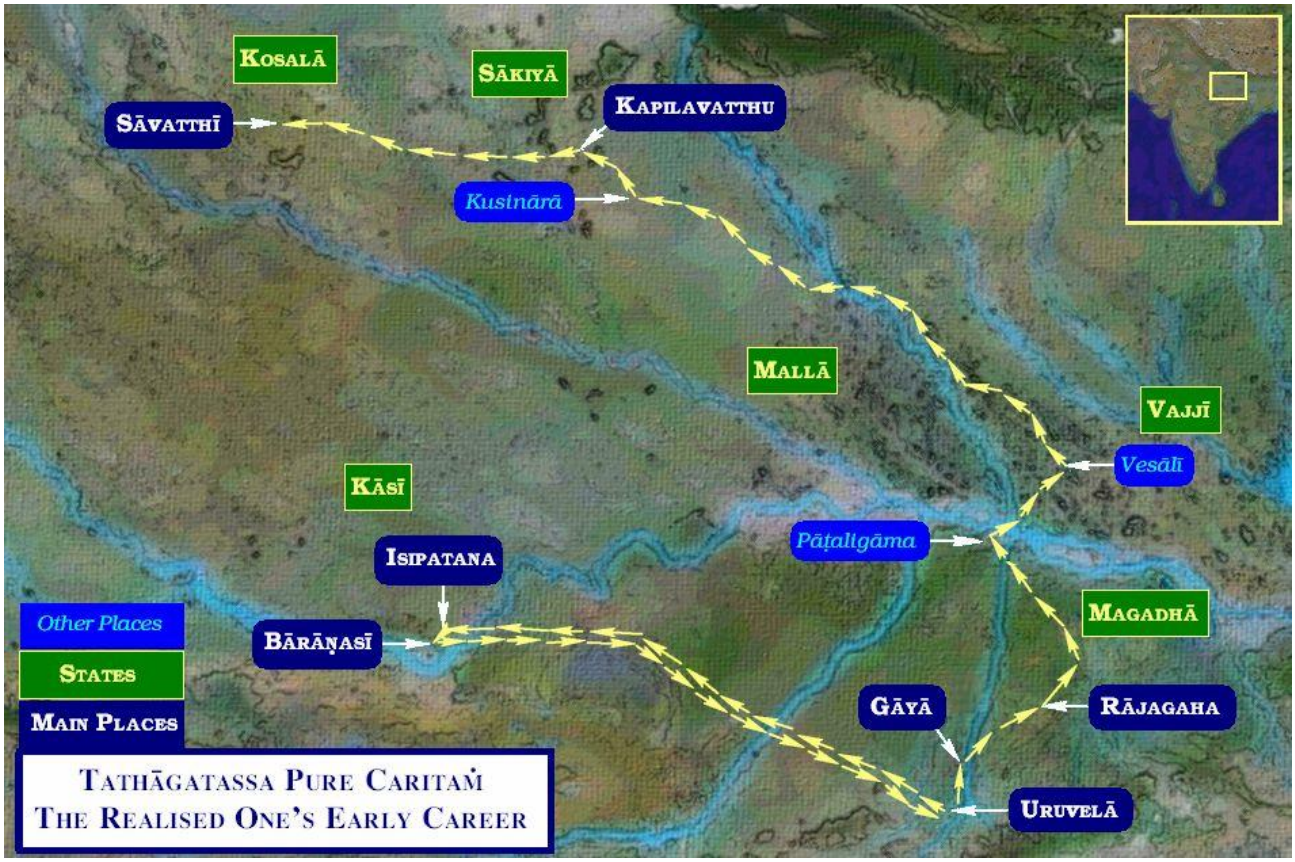
Here you will find presented a number of maps of Buddhist places in Ancient India to help as a reference for those interested in understanding the geography and demographic distribution of places and peoples mentioned in the Buddhist texts. A number of them have been prepared specially for this section, and others accompany particular texts and translations that are presented elsewhere on this website. The intention is to add to this section as and when the need arises.

I have included modern place names in some of the maps so as to help orientate the reader, who may not be familiar with the geography of India. I have also annotated the maps to give sources and further relevant information that could not be included elsewhere.

My main sources for information in compiling the maps have been the following: Geography of Early Buddhism by B.C. Law; Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names by G.P. Malalasekera; Buddhist India by T.W. Rhys-Davids; and Middle Land, Middle Way by S. Dhammika; many other books have incidental information, including the various annotated translations I have consulted during the course of this work. I am particularly grateful to Bhante S. Dhammika for checking the maps through for me and making many useful suggestions and corrections, which has helped improve them considerably.

Ānandajoti Bhikkhu
May 2008

TATHĀGATASSA PURE CĀRITAṂ
THE BUDDHA'S EARLY CAREER



What follows is based on the account in the Mahākhandhaka section of the Vinaya Mahāvagga, and the traditional histories such as the Jātaka Nidāṇakathā, and the Jinavaṁsa:

After Awakening at the foot of the Bodhi tree in Uruvelā the Buddha spent the following 7 weeks in a number of locations in the same area. He then travelled to Isipatana, where his former companions, the group of five (*pañcavaggiya*) ascetics were staying. The walking tour appears to have taken around a week, as he arrived on the Full Moon night of Āsāḷha.

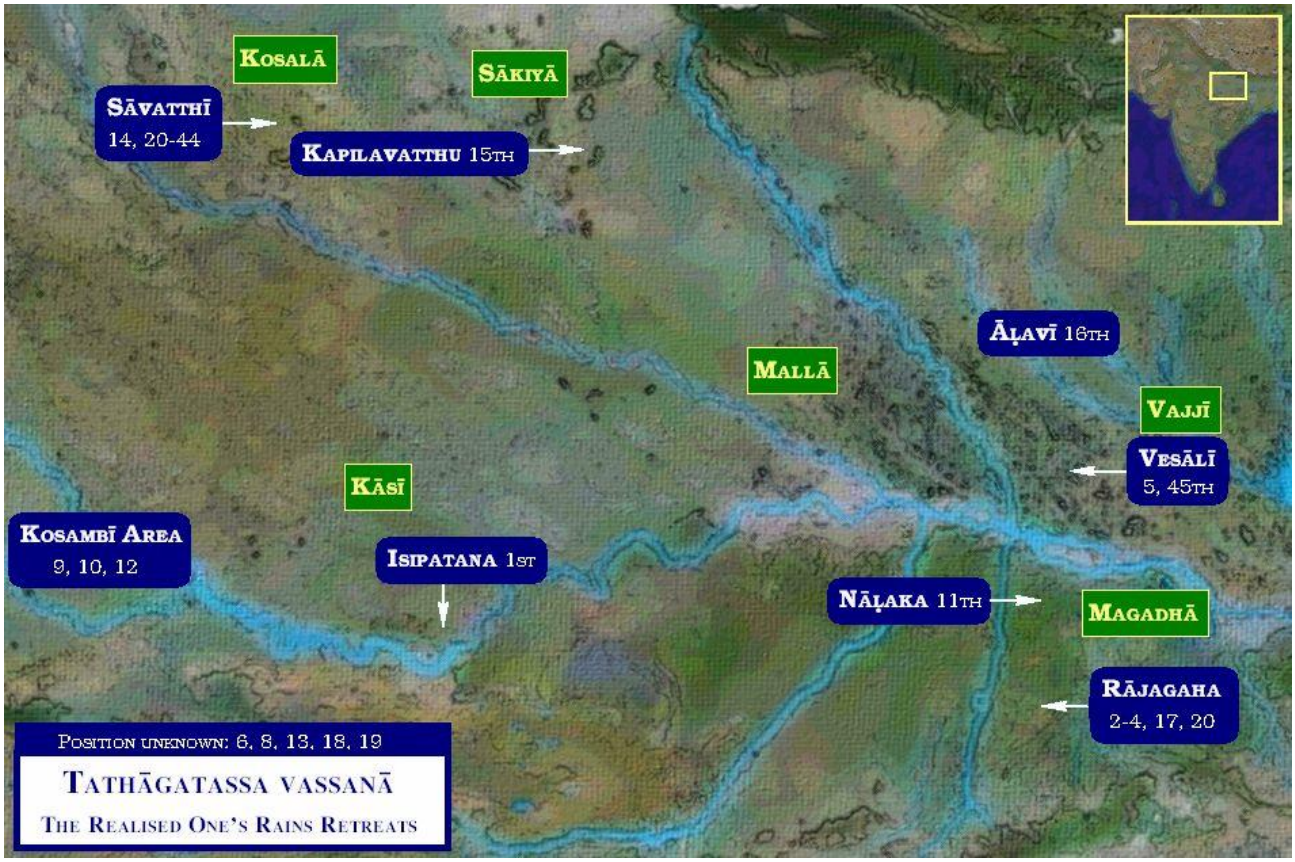
That night he preached his first recorded discourse, and thereby set the Dhamma-Wheel rolling, at the end of which Aññāta Koṇḍaññā became the first person to attain path and fruit in the present Sāsana. In the next few days he and his four companions all became Worthy Ones (*Arahanta*). The Buddha spent the first Vassāna in the Deer-Park at Isipatana, and in a short time converted first Yasa, and then 50 of his friends, who also all became Worthy Ones.

At the end of the Rain's Retreat the Buddha walked back to Uruvelā, where he converted the three Kassapa brothers and their 1,000 disciples. From there he travelled to the Magadhan capital Rājagaha, where he was presented with his first monastery, the Bamboo Wood (*Veḷuvana*) by King Bimbisāra.

Five months had passed since leaving Isipatana and it was now Springtime. Kāḷudāyī arrived from Kapilavatthu, and invited the Buddha to return to his home town. There he converted his former Wife, his Father, and ordained his Son, and other family members, including Nanda and Ānanda.

While he was there the rich merchant Anāthapiṇḍika arrived and invited him to Sāvatthī, where he bought and presented him with the Jeta's Wood monastery. At this point the early histories break off, perhaps because the Sāsana was safely established by this time. Although we know a lot about the Buddha's ministry, the chronology is not picked up again until the Mahāparinibbānasutta opens about one year before the Final Emancipation at Kusinārā.

Tathāgatassa Vassanā
The Realised One's Rain's Retreats



This map shows the various places where the Buddha spent his Rain's Retreats according to the information related in the Introduction to the Commentary on the Buddhavaṁsa, which is also followed by Ven. Medhaṅkara in Jinavaṁsa. Most of them are well known, and appear in the Discourses many times. Of the Retreats we are sure about note that they all were taken in the Middle Lands (*Majjhimadesa*).

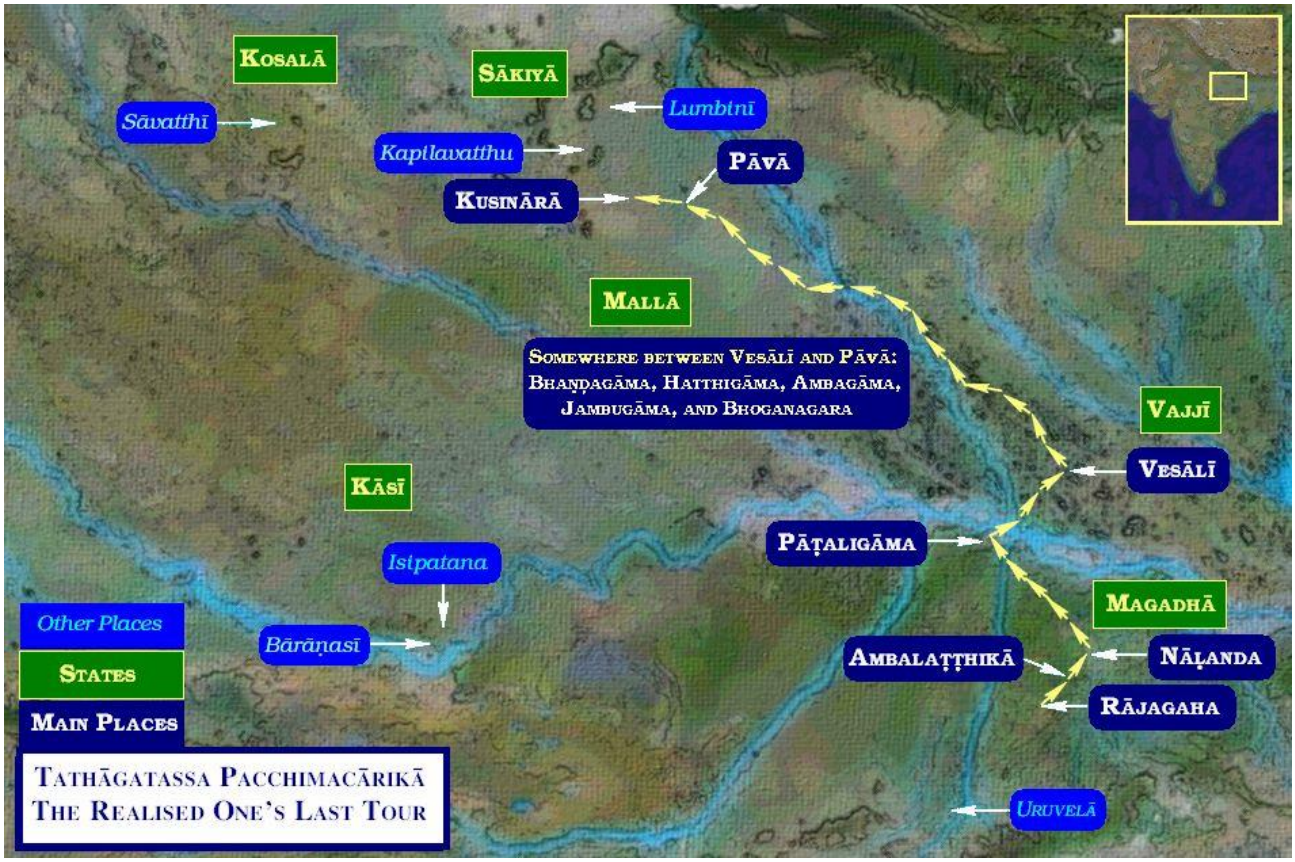
Some of the places we cannot identify. These include the 6th retreat on Mount Maṅkula;[1] 8th at Bhesakalā Wood in the Bhagga Country; 13th, 18th and 19th on Mount Cāliya.[2] Others are only vaguely known, such as Silk-Cotton Wood, Pārileyya and Verañjā, all of which were around Kosambī. The exact position of Āḷavī is also not known, but must have been in the Vajjī Country where there were many yakkha shrines. According to tradition the 7th Rains Retreat was spent in Tāvatiṁsa teaching the Abhidhamma to his Mother, who had been reborn as a Devaputta.

The information given in the Commentary inexplicably omits the last Rain's Retreat spent by the Buddha, which was at the village of Beluva, within walking distance of Vesālī, as related in the Mahāparinibbānasuttaṁ. A text and translation of the relevant section of the Commentary to Buddhavaṁsa follows:

After setting the Dhamma Wheel Rolling in Isipatana and making 180,000,000 Brahmās imbibe the immortal ambrosia during the first Rains Retreat he dwelt at the Deer Park in Isipatana relying on Bārāṇasī (for alms); the second Rains retreat was in the Great Monastery at Bamboo Wood, relying on Rājagaha; the third and fourth likewise (he was) also there; the fifth was in the Gabled House Hall in the Great Wood relying on Vesālī; the sixth on Mount Maṅkula; the seventh in the realm of the 33 gods (*Tāvatiṁsa*); the eighth in the Bhesakaḷā Wood, relying on the Crocodile Hill amongst the Bhaggas; the ninth near Kosambī; the tenth in the Pārileyyaka grove; the eleventh in the brāhmin village of Nāḷa (in Magadhā); the twelfth near Verañjā; the thirteenth on Mount Cāliya; the fourteenth in the great Monastery (near Sāvatthī); the fifteenth near the great city of Kapilavatthu (his home town, amongst the Sākiyans); having tamed (the yakkha) Āḷavaka and making 84,000 creaturess imbibe the immortal ambrosia, (he spent) the sixteenth at Āḷavī; the seventeenth was surely near Rājagaha (perhaps in Bamboo Wood); then the eighteenth on mount Cāliya; but the nineteenth and twentieth Rains Retreat he dwelt near to Rājagaha (perhaps in Bamboo Wood) ... But from there onwards he surely relied on Sāvatthī dwelling in the Great Monastery in Jeta's Wood and the Eastern Monastery because it had constant supplies (of requisites for the large gathering of monks).

[1] ChS: Makula.
[2] ChS: Cālika.

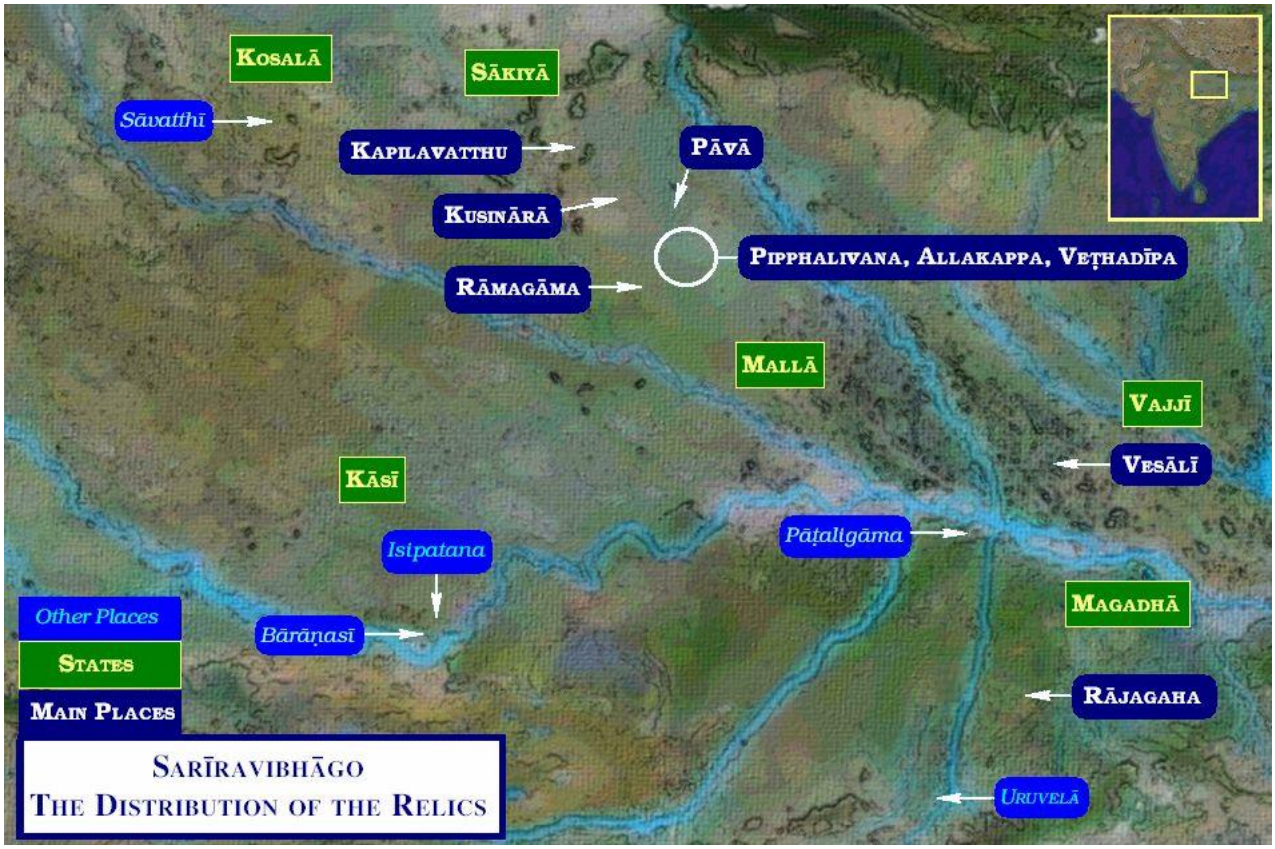
TATHĀGATASSA PACCHIMĀ CĀRIKĀ
THE REALISED ONE'S LAST TOUR



The last year of the Buddha's life is recorded in the Mahāparinibbānasutta of the Dīghanikāya (DN 16), which records his last walking tour in the Middle Country (*Majjhimadesa*). Before the beginning of the Rains Retreat (*Vassāna*) the Buddha walked from Rājagaha to Vesālī where he stayed for a number of months. Eventually the Buddha left Vesālī and started walking North and attained Complete Emancipation (*Parinibbāna*) at Kusinārā.

Looking at the map it very much appears as though the Buddha was actually heading for his home town of Kapilavatthu but succumbed to his illness on the way. The Buddha fell ill with dysentry in Pāvā and according to the very sad story in the Commentary, on the last day of his tour he actually had to sit down and rest no less than 25 times before reaching Kusinārā in the evening.

Sarīravibhāgo
The Distribution of the Relics



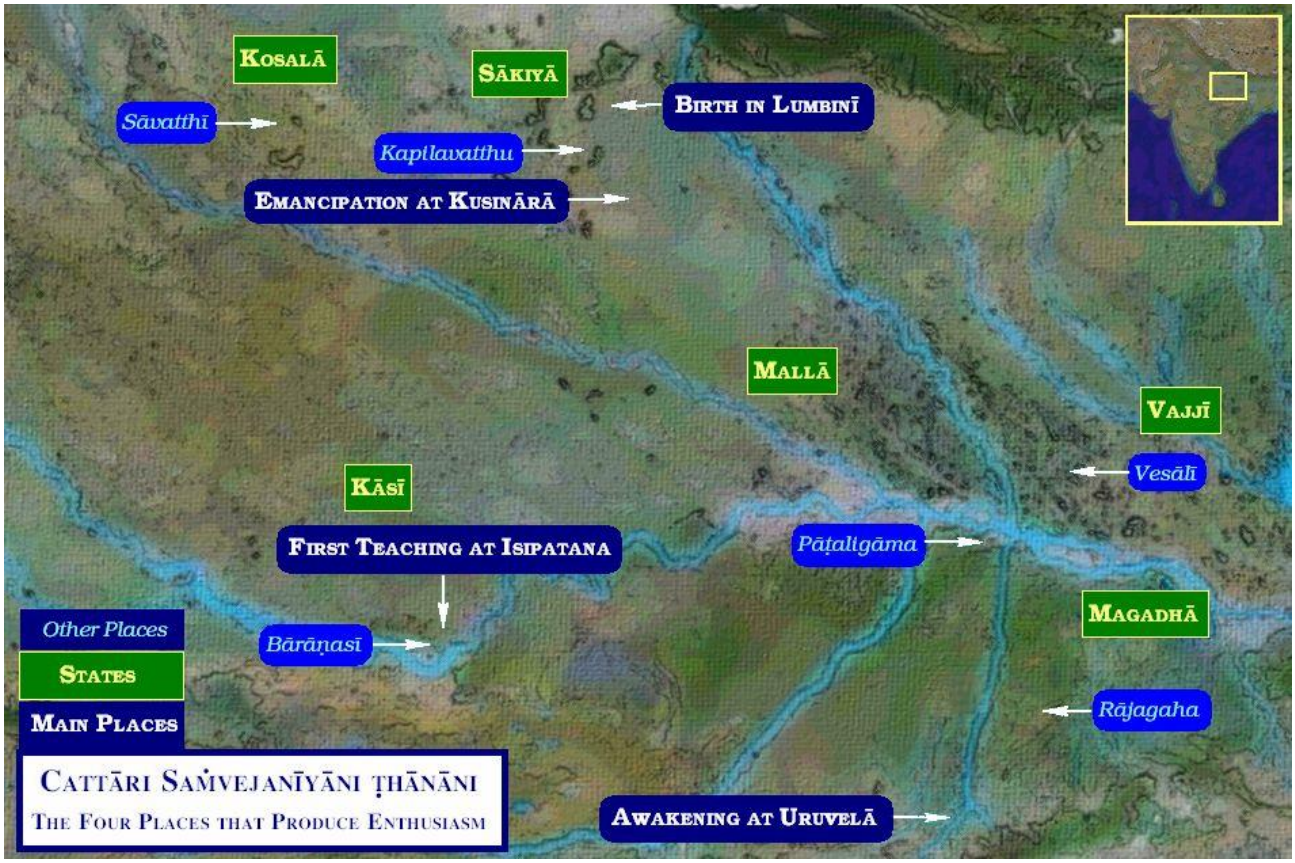
The exact positions of Pipphalivana, Allakappa, and Veṭhadīpa are not known. One of the more interesting things this map brings out is that Sāvatthī and Bārāṇasī did not get a share of the relics, and apart from the relics that were taken to Vesālī and Rājagaha, all the others were distributed locally.

from Mahāparinibbānasuttaṁ

- Then the Magadhan King Ajātasattu, the son of Lady Wisdom, made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Rājagaha and held a festival.
- The Licchavīs from Vesālī made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Vesālī and held a festival.
- The Sakyas from Kapilavatthu made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Kapilavatthu and held a festival.
- The Bulas of Allakappa made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Allakappa and held a festival.
- The Koliyas of Rāmagāma made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Rāmagāma and held a festival.
- The Veṭhadīpaka brahmin made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Veṭhadīpa and held a festival.
- The Mallas of Pāvā made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Pāvā and held a festival.

- The Mallas of Kusinārā made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Kusinārā and held a festival.
- Doṇa the brahmin made a Shrine for the urn and held a festival.
- The Moriyās of Pipphalivana made a Shrine for the ashes at Pipphalivana and held a festival.
- Thus there were eight Shrines for the bodily relics, the Vessel Shrine was the ninth, and the Ashes Shrine was the tenth, and so it was former times.

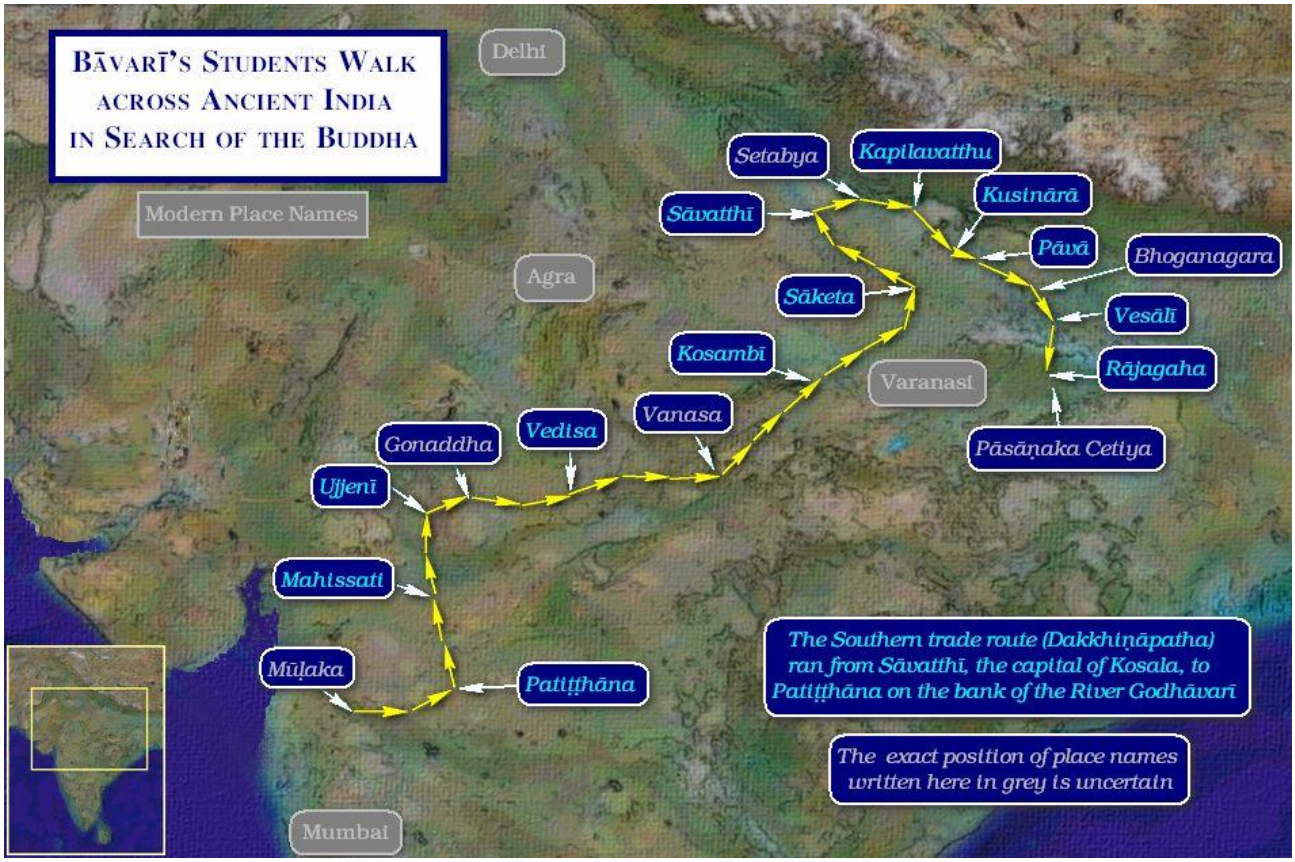
Cattāri Saṁvejanīyāni Ṭhānāni
The Four Places that Produce Enthusiasm



from Mahāparinibbānasuttaṁ, Section 35:

> These are the four places, Ānanda, that are to be seen that produce enthusiasm for a faithful man of good family. Faithful monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen will come, (thinking): 'Here the Realised One was born', 'Here the Realised One awoke to the unsurpassed and Perfect Awakening', 'Here the Realised One set rolling the Wheel of the Teaching', 'Here the Realised One was Completely Emancipated in the Emancipation-element which has no basis for attachment remaining', and whoever, Ānanda, will die while on pilgrimage to the Shrines with a confident mind they will all, at the break-up of the body, after death, re-arise in a fortunate destiny, in a heavenly world.

BĀVARISSA MĀṆAVACĀRIKĀ JAMBUDĪPE
BĀVARĪ'S STUDENTS' WALK ACROSS ANCIENT INDIA



from Pārāyanavaggo, verses 31-38:

After hearing Bāvarī's words, the sixteen brahmin students ... set out for the North. From Mūḷaka to Patiṭṭhāna first, then on to Mahissati, to Ujjenī, and Gonaddha, to Vedisa, and to the place called Vanasa, to Kosambī, and Sāketa, and Sāvatthī, the city supreme, to Setabya, and Kapilavatthu, and to the city of Kusinārā, to Pāvā, to Bhoganagara, to Vesālī, to the Magadhan city (Rājagaha), and to the Pāsāṇaka Shrine, delightful, it is the mind's delight.

Bāvarī had left Sāvatthī, the capital of Kosala, some time before and retired to a very remote place on the bank of the Godhāvarī River, which was about as far south as the Ariyans had penetrated at that time. There students gathered around him, including 16 who became teachers in their own right. When Bāvarī heard that a Sambuddha had arisen in the world he sent his students to question him. They first headed for Sāvatthī itself, where the Buddha had been staying, but when he saw them coming, realising that they were not mature enough, he withdrew to Rājagaha and to the Pāsāṇaka Shrine. Their walking tour covered a distance of some 1,800 kilometres.

SOḶASA MAHĀJANAPADĀ
THE 16 GREAT STATES

In two places in the Aṅguttaranikāya (Uposathasuttaṁ, Bk. 3.71; Vitthatūposathasuttaṁ, Bk. 8.42) we find the following list of great states (Mahājanapadā): Aṅgā, Magadhā, Kāsī, Kosalā, Vajjī, Mallā, Cetī, Vaṁsā,[3] Kurū, Pañcālā, Macchā, Sūrasenā, Assakā, Avantī, Gandhārā, Kambojā.

We sometimes come across other forms of this list, so that at Janavasabhasuttaṁ (DN 18) only the following ten are mentioned: Kāsī, Kosalā, Vajjī, Mallā, Cetī, Vaṁsā, Kurū, Pañcālā, Macchā,[4] Sūrasenā. Interestingly, the Sākiyas and the Koḷiyans are omitted from these lists, perhaps they were not considered as great states, being too small in size.

Below is a list of the State Capitals, and their Kings where they are known. The most important ones by far are the first two. Remember that the Buddha lived for 80 years and the political situation was always changing:

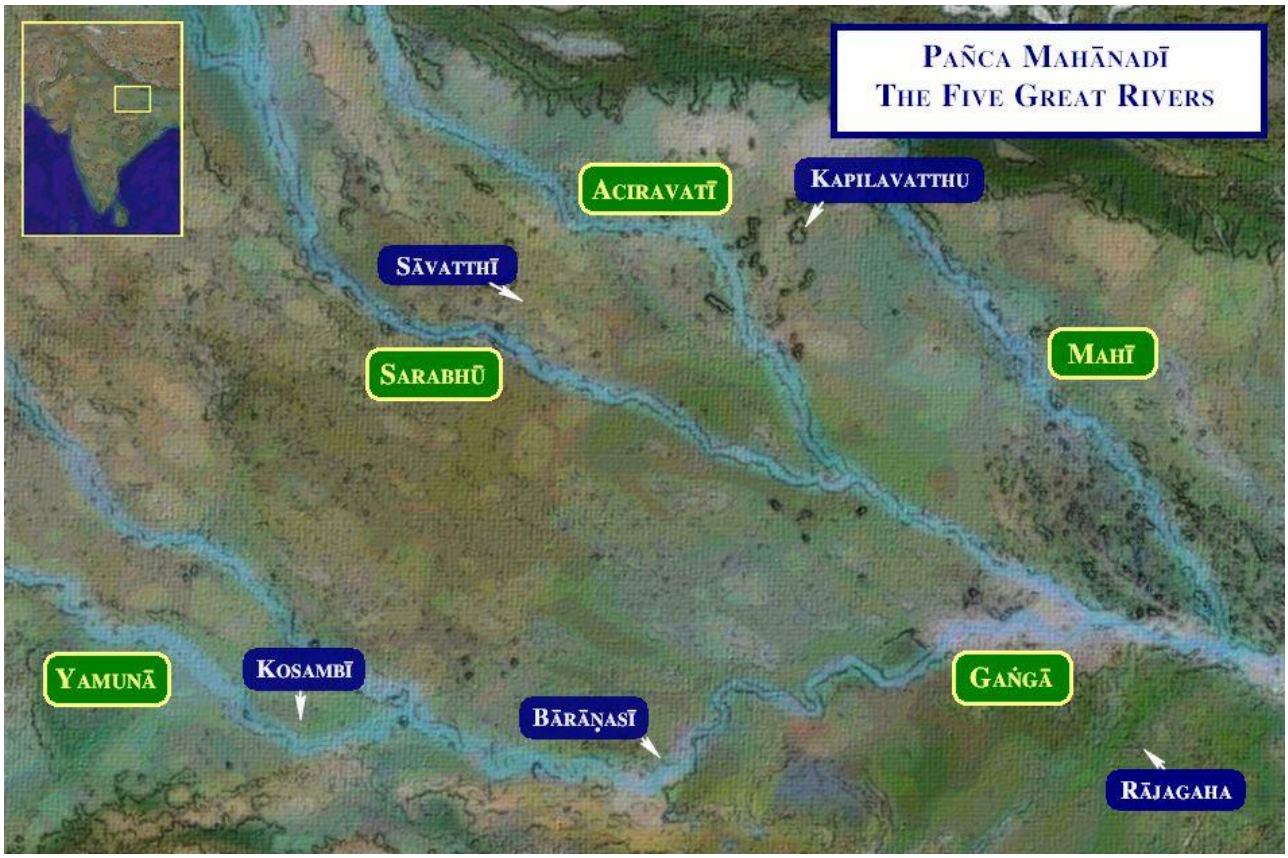
- Magadhā (Capital: Rājagaha; King Bimbisāra, later Ajātasattu)
- Kosalā (Capital: Sāvatthī; King Pasenadi)

- Aṅgā (Capital: Campā)
- Kāsī (Capital: Bārānasī)

[3] ChS: Vaṅgā.
[4] ChS: Majjhā.

- Vajjī (Republic)
- Mallā (Republic) [Sākiyā (Republic), Koḷiyā (Republic)]
- Vaṁsā (Capital: Kosambī, King Udena)
- Cetī (Sotthivatī)
- Kurū (Capital: Indapatta)
- Pañcālā
- Macchā (Capital: Virāṭanagara; King Virāṭa)
- Sūrasenā (Capital: Mathurā)
- Assakā (Capital: Potana)
- Avantī (Capital: Ujjenī in the North, Māhissatī in the South; King Vessabhū)
- Gandhārā (Capital: Takkasilā)
- Kambojā.

Pañca Mahānadī
The Five Great Rivers



from Udāna 5-5: Uposathasuttaṁ (45)

Seyyathā pi bhikkhave yā kāci mahānadiyo, seyyathīdaṁ:
Just as, monks, whatever great rivers there are, that is to say:

Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Aciravatī, Sarabhū, Mahī,
The Gaṅgā, the Yamunā, the Aciravatī, the Sarabhū, and the Mahī,

tā mahāsamuddaṁ patvā jahanti pūrimāni nāmagottāni,
having arrived at the great ocean, give up their former lineages and names,

mahāsamuddo tveva saṅkhaṁ gacchanti,
and are then designated as the great ocean,

evam-eva kho bhikkhave cattāro me vaṇṇā:
so, monks, there are these four classes:

Khattiyā, Brāhmaṇā, Vessā, Suddā, te Tathāgatappavedite
˚ Khattiyas, Brāhmaṇas, Vessas, and Suddas, who, having gone forth

Dhammavinaye agārasmā anagāriyaṁ pabbajitvā,
from the home to homelessness in the Dhamma and Discipline taught by the Realised One,

jahanti purimāni nāmagottāni,
give up their former lineages and names,

samaṇā Sakyaputtiyā tveva saṅkhaṁ gacchanti.
and are then designated as Sakyan ascetics.

Yaṁ bhikkhave cattāro me vaṇṇā:
That, monks, there are these four classes:

Khattiyā, Brāhmaṇā, Vessā, Suddhā, te Tathāgatappavedite
Khattiyas, Brāhmaṇas, Vessas, and Suddas, who, having gone forth

Dhammavinaye agārasmā anagāriyaṁ pabbajitvā,
from the home to homelessness in the Dhamma and Discipline taught by the Realised One,

jahanti purimāni nāmagottāni,
give up their former lineages and names,

samaṇā Sakyaputtiyā tveva saṅkhaṁ gacchanti,
and are then designated as Sakyan ascetics,

ayam-pi bhikkhave imasmiṁ Dhammavinaye catuttho
˚ is the fourth wonderful and marvellous thing, monks,

acchariyo abbhutadhammo,
about this Dhamma and Discipline,

yaṁ disvā disvā bhikkhū imasmiṁ Dhammavinaye abhiramanti.
which, having seen and considered, the monks delight in this Dhamma and Discipline.

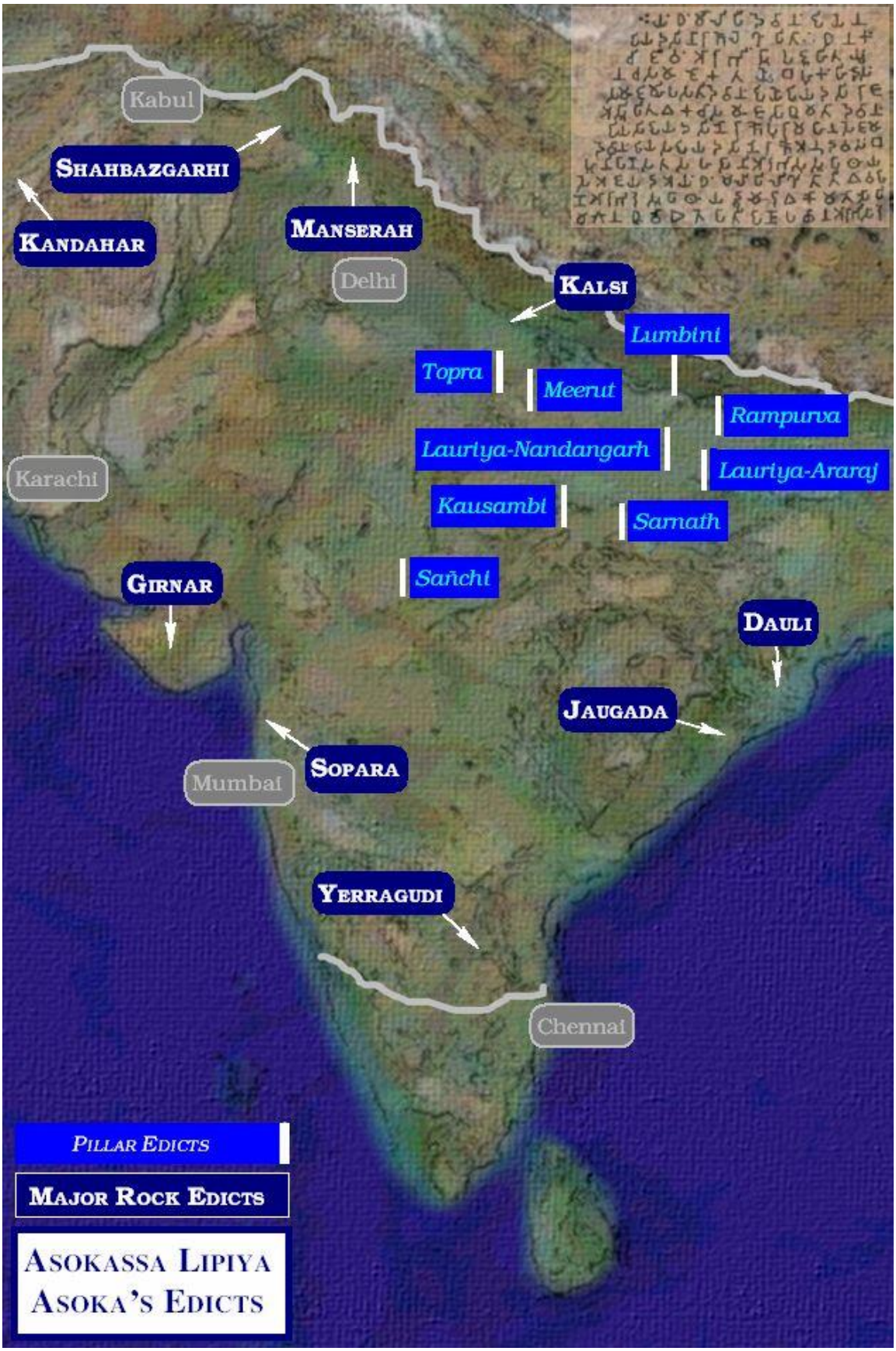
ANOTATTASARO CA SINERUPABBATO CA
MOUNT SINERU AND LAKE ANOTATTA

The Buddha is said to have traversed the great distance from Uruvelā to the Himālayas to spend the day at Lake Anotatta during the time he was trying to convert the Uruvelā Kassapa, shortly after the Awakening, but the latter was still not convinced of the Buddha's superiority. It is mentioned as one of the seven great lakes in the Himālayas (AN Bk. 7.66. The others are named as Sīhapapāta, Rathakāra, Kaṇṇamuṇḍā, Kuṇāla, Chaddanta, Mandākinī).

In the same Aṅguttara discourse Mount Sineru is mentioned as the King of Mountains (*Pabbatarājā*). The mountain is also known in the Pāḷi texts as Neru, Mahāmeru, Meru and Kelasa. It is identified now with Mount Kailash in western Tibet. The Lake Anotatta, which is identified with Lake Manasarovar is on the rocky plains (*silātala*) in front of the mountain range.

Sineru takes on mythical proportions in the Commentaries, where the Tāvatiṁsa Heaven in said to be positioned on its summit, and the abode of the Demons at its base (SnA ii.485).

Asokassa Lipiyo
Asoka's Edicts

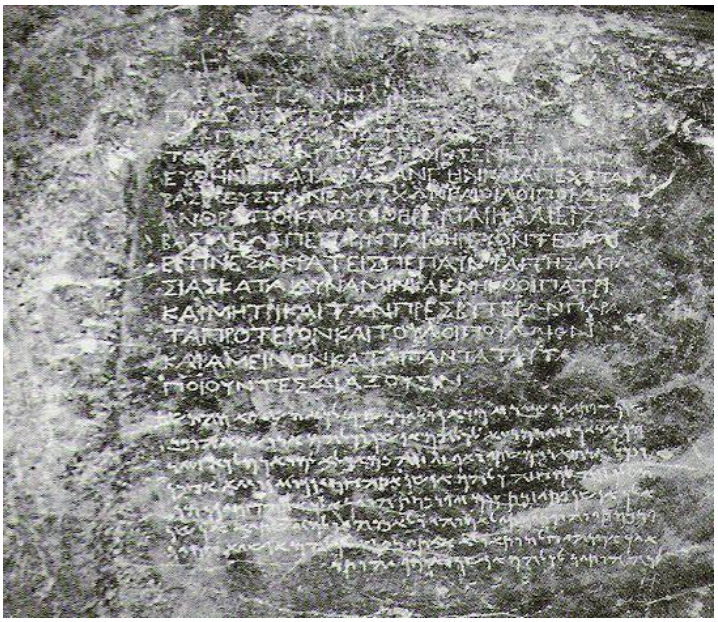


Translation of Inset written in Brāhmī script at Girnar (by S. Dhammika):

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, has caused this Dhamma edict to be written. Here (in my domain) no living beings are to be slaughtered or offered in sacrifice. Nor should festivals be held, for Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, sees much to object to in such festivals, although there are some festivals that Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, does approve of.

Formerly, in the kitchen of Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, hundreds of thousands of animals were killed every day to make curry. But now with the writing of this Dhamma edict only three creatures, two peacocks and a deer are killed, and the deer not always. And in time, not even these three creatures will be killed.

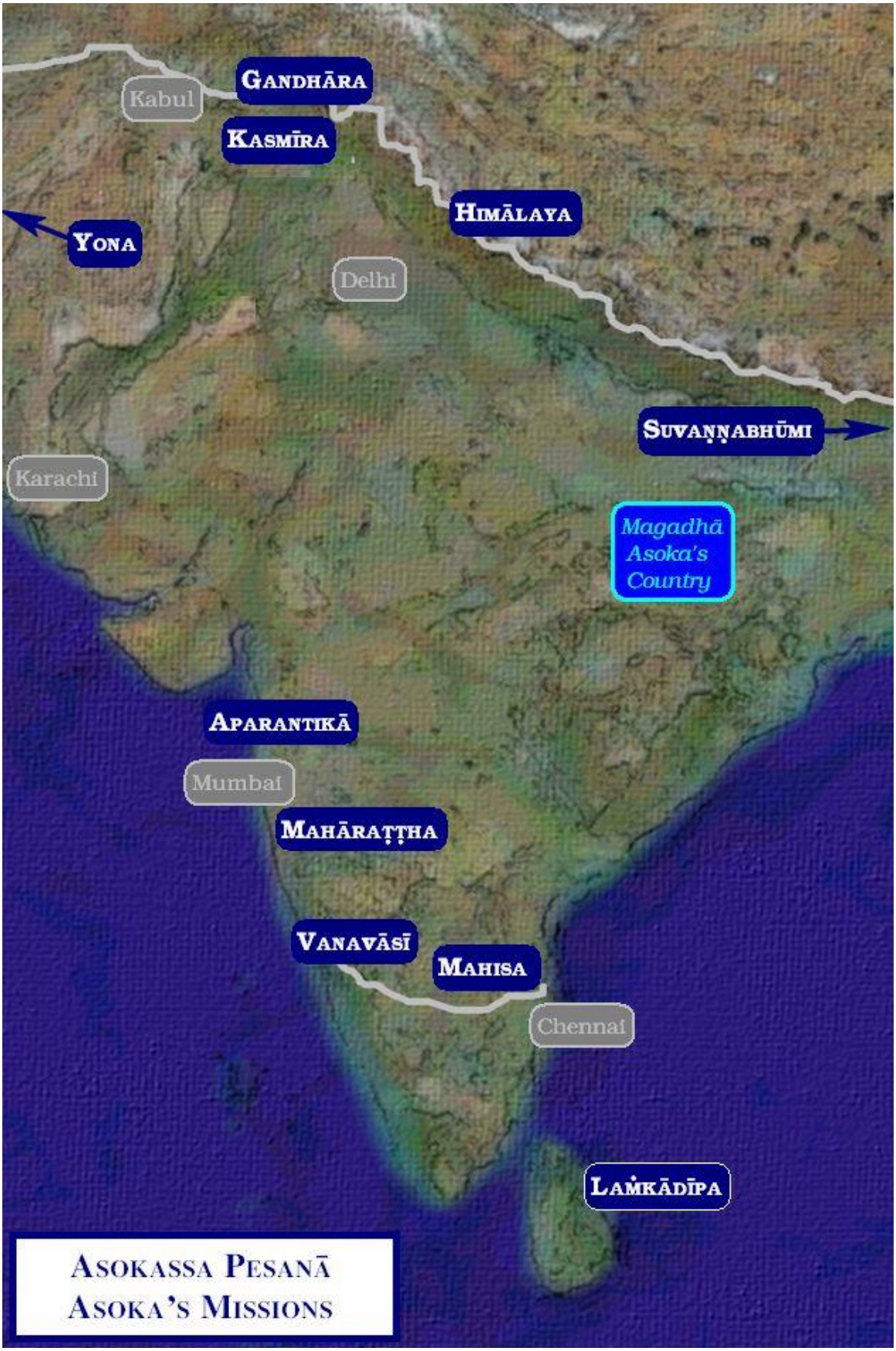
Kandahar Inscription



Translation of Inscription written in Greek (top) and Aramaic (bottom) at Kandahar (by G.P. Carratelli):

Ten years (of reign) having been completed, King Piodasses (Ashoka) made known (the doctrine of) Piety (Eusebeia) to men; and from this moment he has made men more pious, and everything thrives throughout the whole world. And the king abstains from (killing) living beings, and other men and those who (are) huntsmen and fishermen of the king have desisted from hunting. And if some (were) intemperate, they have ceased from their intemperance as was in their power; and obedient to their father and mother and to the elders, in opposition to the past also in the future, by so acting on every occasion, they will live better and more happily.

Asokassa Pesanā
Asoka's Missions



There is a discrepency about the Asokan Missions. According to the Edicts King Asoka himself sent them out, but according to Pāḷi sources, like the Vinayanidāna and Mahāvaṁsa it was his preceptor and advisor, the elder Moggaliputtatissa. Here is a summary of the monks involved and the places they went to according to the Mahāvaṁsa:

Majjhantika to Kasmīra and Gandhāra
Mahādeva to Mahisamaṇḍala
Rakkhita to Vanavāsī
Dhammarakkhita to Aparantikā
Mahādhammarakkhita to Mahāraṭṭha
Mahārakkhita to Yonaloka
Majjhima to the Himālayas
Soṇa and Uttara to Suvaṇṇabhūmi
Mahinda, Iṭṭhiya, Uttiya, Sambala and Bhaddasāla to Laṁkādīpa.

FROM MAHĀVAṀSA, XII, VERSES 1-8:

Thero Moggaliputto so, Jinasāsanajotako,
The elder Moggaliputta, the light of the Victor's Dispensation,

Niṭṭhāpetvāna Saṁgītiṁ, pekkhamāno anāgataṁ.
Having brought the (3rd) Council to a close, looked towards the future.

Sāsanassa patiṭṭhānaṁ paccantesu avekkhiya
Having seen the establishment of the Dispensation in the border countries

Pesesi Kattike māse te te there tahiṁ tahiṁ.
During the month of Kattika (November) he sent various elders here and there.

Theraṁ Kasmīragandhāraṁ Majjhantikam-apesayi,
He sent the elder Majjhantika to Kasmīra and Gandhāra,

Apesayī Mahādevattheraṁ Mahisamaṇḍalaṁ.
He sent the elder Mahādeva to Mahisamaṇḍala.

Vanavāsiṁ apesayi theraṁ Rakkhitanāmakaṁ
To Vanavāsī he sent the elder by the name of Rakkhita

Tathāparantakaṁ Yonadhammarakkhitanāmakaṁ.
But the Greek by the name of Dhammarakkhita to Aparantikā.

Mahāraṭṭhaṁ Mahādhammarakkhitattheranāmakaṁ,
To Mahāraṭṭha (he sent) the elder by the name of Mahādhammarakkhita,

Mahārakkhitatheraṁ taṁ Yonalokam-apesayi.
He sent to the world of the Greeks the elder Mahārakkhita.

Pesesi Majjhimaṁ theraṁ Himavantapadesakaṁ,
He sent the elder Majjhima to the place of the snows (Himālaya)

Suvaṇṇabhūmiṁ there dve Soṇam-uttaram-eva ca.
To Suvaṇṇabhūmi (he sent) two elders, Soṇa and Uttara.

Mahāmahindattheraṁ taṁ thera Iṭṭhiyam-Uttiyaṁ,
That Great Elder Mahinda, Iṭṭhiya and Uttiya,

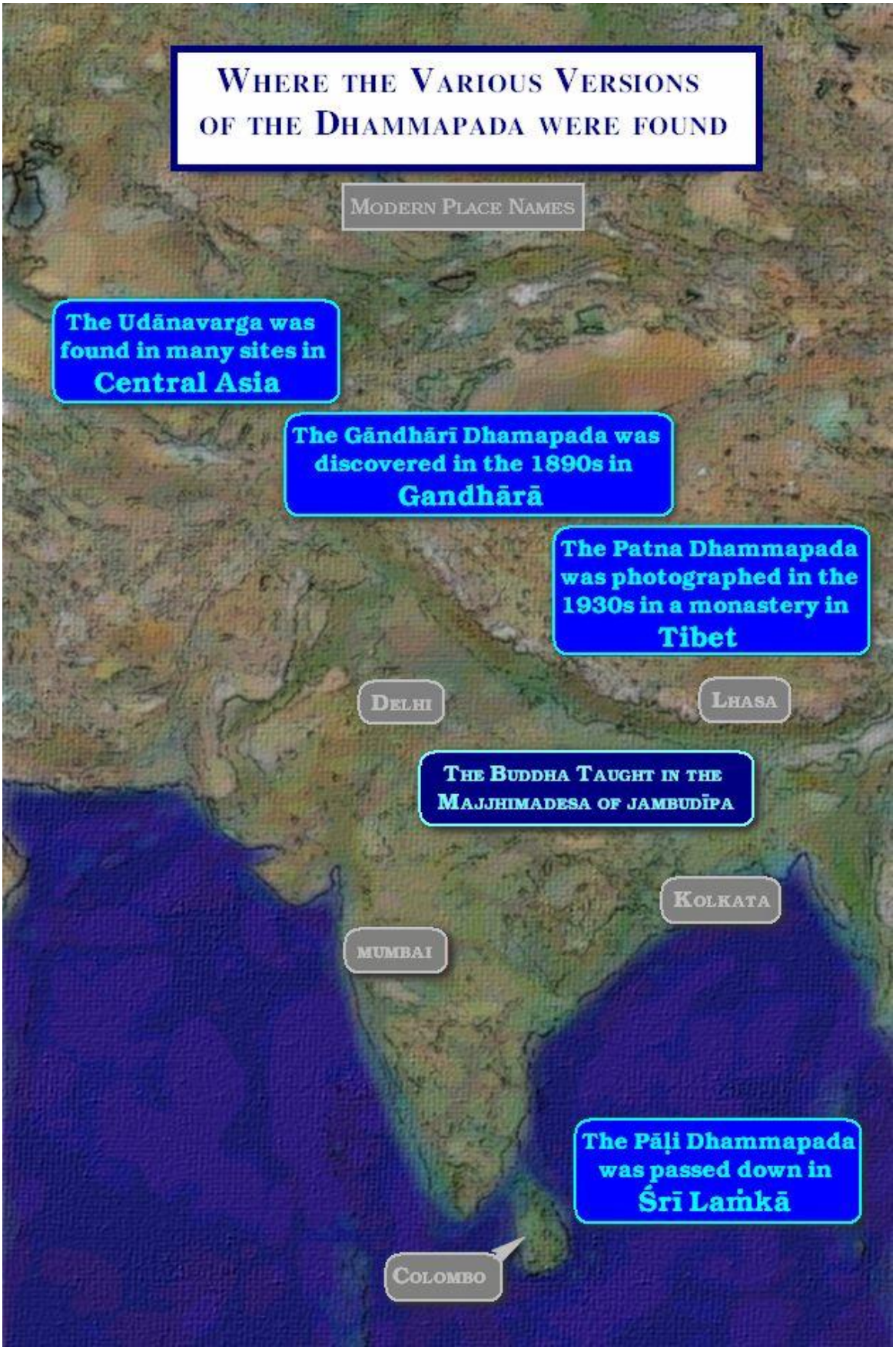
Sambalaṁ Bhaddasālañ-ca, sake saddhivihārike,
Sambala and Bhaddasāla,[5] his attendant monks,

"Laṁkādīpe manuññamhi manuññaṁ Jinasāsanaṁ
* He sent these five elders, (saying): "You must establish

Patiṭṭhāpetha tumhe" ti pañca there apesayi.
In the pleasant Island of (Śrī) Laṁkā the pleasant Dispensation of the Victor."

[5] It appears two others accompanied Mahinda to Laṁkā, they are the novice Sumana, and the upāsaka Bhanduka.

Dharmapadāni Āyatanāni
Where the Dhammapada-s were found



The Buddha taught mainly in and around the North-Eastern area of India which was known as the Majjhimadesa (the Middle Country), and after his Final Emancipation his teachings were originally collected there. It is curious indeed that although first taught and collected in India none of the texts we now possess today actually come from there, but have survived in the border countries long after all traces of the books were lost in their Homeland in the Middle Ages.

The Pāḷi Tipiṭaka has been passed down through the Śrī Laṅkan Saṅgha; various Sankritised Prakrit texts, which were written down on birch bark, survived in the deserts in Central Asia; and others rescensions have been found in Nepal and Tibet. The oldest book that has come down to us from Ancient times is a rescension of the Dhammapada preserved in the Gāndhārī dialect. Unfortunately for us it was ripped into 3 pieces and sold off to explorers in the late 19th century; one part went to Paris, another went to St. Petersburg, and a third part went missing altogether.

The edition of the text we now know as the Patna Dhammapada was found in an unknown Tibetan monastery by Rāhula Saṁskṛtāyana sometime in the 1930s. There is one set of photographs of the work,[6] and parts of it are obscured so that they cannot be read properly. What happened to the work after the Chinese invasion of Tibet in the 1950s is not known at present. It was possibly removed to Beijing, but there is no confirmation of this.

Literally hundreds of manuscript fragments of the Udānavarga have been found in the Central Asian deserts, which testifies to the popularity of the work. Piecing them all together again to form a coherent text was a mammoth undertaking performed by Dr. Bernhard in the 1950s (published 1965-67). It appears now however that he has mixed up two different rescensions of the work[7] so that the value of his undertaking has been somewhat diminished with time. Recently a new edition has been made of one of the rescensions by H. Hakatani entitled Udanavarga de Subasi.[8]

The testimonies for the Pāḷi rescension of the work were mainly written on perishable ola-leaves and date back only a few centuries, but there are very many of them, and they also are corrobated by other works, so there can be no doubt about the age of the work. It appears that the Śrī Laṅkan Saṅgha has very faithfully passed the work down over the millennium, which we can be sure of, as the text contains many readings that are unmetrical and even ungrammatical, but which have not been cleaned up or revised by the recitors, which they would have been had the texts been tampered with.

[6] The name is derived from the current location of the photographs in the J.P. Jayaswal Research Institute of Patna.

[7] Lambert Schmithausen 1970: *Zu den Rezensionen des Udanavarga* in Wiener Zeitschrift fur die Kunde Sudasiens, vol 14 pp 47-124.

[8] Published by Publications de l'Institut de civilisation indienne, Paris.